

Coyote Two Moon

To say that this endurance run is a “quirky little run” would be an understatement. Beginning with the Race Director appointing every racer a call name - mine being “Au “ Gratton and my friend Chris “ Chilly “ Frost. The allure of this cultish race was exhibited in the runners I met along the course as well....some sporting butterfly wings, adorning bunny ears or jingle bells, more grown men wearing propeller hats than I care to mention and lots of colorful gaiters. They had come from all over the country to participate in this 100 M/100K trail race in a quaint little mountainside community called Ojai. Let the adventure begin!

Chilly and I had a start time of 12 noon Saturday. Starting on the Thatcher school soccer fields, our start group would receive “Bonus minutes” if we passed a soccer ball among the group while running around the perimeter of the field!!! At the end of the field, leave the ball and start the 4 mile climb up Horn canyon. All good, except Chilly and I were about 30 seconds late getting to the start line...damn! We were sure to receive “Boner minutes” for being late....told you it was a “quirky little run.” What Race Director gives out Bonus and Boner minutes? I love it. Once we ran the perimeter, we grabbed a cheat sheet to help navigate the mileage on the course. Phew. 12:06 pm we started our climb out of Horn. Five water crossings, one change of clothes, two swigs of Perpetuem, two electrolyte pills, and one anti-fatigue pill later, we were half way to the top of Horn. Before reaching the top, it started to snow. It was only 1:20 in the afternoon and we had approximately 17 more hours to go-HA! Once reaching the top of Horn, we started our run to the first aid station on the ridge. By this time, it was pretty damn cold and I was grateful I hadn't shed my pants for my running skirt.

After a quick stop at the aid station and a card selection from one of the volunteers (each station had a volunteer armed with a deck of cards from which each runner had to choose one and then the volunteer noted on your check in/out report which card you drew – I told you it was a “quirky little run”)... we sprinted out into a snow storm. Literally. The flakes had gotten so big, we could see the uniqueness in each one. The good news, they weren't sticking. We kept at it for several miles before the beautiful snowflakes turned into mini balls of ice. They were now bouncing off the ground. It felt like a dermabrasion treatment on my face.

By the time we got to Rose Valley, the first of four fingers we were meant to run, the assault on my face had stopped. Veteran runners of C2M (Coyote Two Moon) forewarned us to save our quads on Rose. It was described as “one MF'er” of a hill. A hill you could reach out and touch by simply extending your arm!!! And at times, you could have done just that. So, Chilly and I ran what we ran and saved our legs for later. We still had about 52 miles to go. At the bottom of Rose Valley, we refueled and started the 2 + miles back up the “MF”er”.

At the top of Rose, we exhaled and continued our run to Howards Creek. By this time, the snow/ice combo had stopped and we could see a small patch of blue between the next weather system heading our way. It stayed dry on our descent into Howards Creek. Howards Creek is one of my new favorite trails in SoCal. It was one of the most memorable parts of this experience for me. Simply beautiful. So, we reach Howards Creek aid station with open arms. The volunteers came running out to meet us. Offering soup, quesadillas, coffee, hot chocolate and merlot, of course. No joke, they had a full bar!!! Did I mention these volunteers had the music playing while fashioned in 70's clothing complete with afro wigs and love beads? We chatted with the volunteers for a while, had our picture taken a few times, refueled, drew a card from the deck, lightened our packs a bit and away we went back up Howards Creek.

By the time we reached the top of Howards Creek, we had to switch on our headlamps. The daylight we were hoping to have had rapidly vanished behind the storm clouds. It was a short run across the ridge to the Gridley aid station where we were greeted by grown men and women in Farm animal costumes. Did I mention on our mileage cheat

sheet it gave pointers for accruing “Bonus minutes”? Like kissing and hugging a Farm animal at Gridley aid station! Crazy, but you gotta love it. Anyway, we refueled, drew a card, passed on the offer of Jagermeister (no joke) and started our 8 mile run to Cozy Dell.

The first mile was up with the later 7 down...which doesn't sound bad, but we were in full night gear by this point. The air had gotten so cold I could see my breath and it made it hard to navigate the trail with my headlamp. Each time I exhaled, a plume of hot air would block my already narrowed line of vision. The first mile of Cozy Dell is a fire road, but the descent is mostly single track and the weather had worsened as we continued down the already sketchy trail. Chilly and I coined the phrase “ you'd fall into another zip code” with some of the drop offs on the trail. The trail was narrow and traffic was moving up and down . Some of the runners we passed had started their 100 mile race on Friday night and they were over 65 miles into their adventure. Most runners we passed going down (they were coming up) were not very cheerful...actually they seemed miserable...hmmmm??? Chilly and I started to wonder. It had been raining for a while now and it was dark. The only illumination was our head lamps. I was getting a bit tired and needed to stay focused, so I didn't end up in another zip code...if you know what I mean. About half way down the trail, Chilly and I ran into one of Chilly's friends Howard. Howard is a very experienced ultra runner. He had started Friday at midnight and was feeling pretty beat up. I only share this with you, cause to see Howard in this condition was a bit disheartening. This is a guy who has completed several Western States(google it) and won many ultras. A seasoned endurance athlete. After a quick exchange with Howard, Chilly and I continue our descent. It was a muddy mess. We actually ran with platform shoes made of mud for about a half mile. The only way around parts of the mud was to slop through the grasses on the sides which left our feet completely soaked. Now we had soaked feet and cause for blisters. Oh well, about 1 1/2 miles from the bottom it got even worse. It was suggested the best way to navigate the mud was to simply surf it down. You couldn't run it. And that's just what we did. I am surprised neither of us fell. We arrived at the Cozy Dell (re-named Cozy Hell) aid station around 9:30 pm. At this point, I am tired, wet, cold and trying to wrap my head around the 8 miles of climb I needed to do to get back up Cozy Hell to the top of Gridley! Meantime, Chilly and I check in, grab a few things from our drop bag, slam a cup of hot soup and head over to the tent to draw a card and check out. I am starting to shake and need to get moving to get warm again... the rain and wind has picked up. I need to start moving. Chilly and I draw our cards, check out and head back to the trail head. Just before the trail head, Chilly turns to me and asks if I am ok to continue. My heart says “hell ya” my head isn't sure. My feet are soaked, my first layer is wet, but I refuse to change cause it's so f'n cold. My core is cold and I am still shaking, so Chilly says I have to change or we can't head back up the trail. I very reluctantly go back to the aid station, get my drop bag and grab a dry long sleeve. One of the volunteers allows me to change in the trailer. First I had to take off my sneakers, but my hands weren't working very well. My gloves were wet and I had lost a lot of mobility in my fingers. Fine motor skills-not! So a volunteer came into the trailer to help me change, as I could not zip and unzip my layers of clothing. Once changed, I put my soaking wet sneakers over my soaking wet socks. I had dry socks, but it made no sense to change at the bottom of Cozy Hell when I had to ascent the trail through the water and mud. I would change them at the top of Gridley. Now it was Chilly's turn to change. As I waited for him outside the trailer, a van pulled up and one of the volunteers asked if anyone else wanted to take the van? It might be the last one out tonight. It was a bit chaotic at this point. The weather had gotten worse in the 10 minutes we came back to change. A runner was unaccounted for, other runners were dropping and I needed to make a decision very quickly. Was I equipped to make the 8 mile climb to the next aid station? It would take us about 2 1/2 hours...so I opened the trailer door and told Chilly I thought we should take this last opportunity to get out of Cozy Hell. He agreed. I hated the idea of not finishing the race, but I didn't think it was wise. So we grabbed our stuff and hopped in the van. I mentally beat myself up all the way back to Chilly's jeep. This was not how I wanted my adventure to end.

It wasn't until the next morning when Chilly and I find out the RD called the race at midnight that night!!! Now I felt better about my decision. If Chilly and I had started back up Cozy Hell at 10pm, we would have been turned around about half way. All runners between Cozy Hell and Gridley were instructed to turn around wherever they were and descend Cozy Hell. That would have sucked.

Our friend Howard arrived at the top of Gridley around 11:30pm...freezing, unable to remember people's names, no focus...in early stages of hypothermia. After hearing his story, I was feeling even wiser about my decision. Howard said all runners and volunteers evacuated the ridge safely. A 78 year old, 230 lb man with a bum knee had to be escorted down the 5.5 mile trail to Gridley bottom...the fastest way off the ridge. A human chain was formed to get the 78 year old across the water crossing that had become a small river. As of last night, some of the aid station equipment still remained on top of Gridley due to a landslide...an epic night on the ridge!